



Tampa Bay Skeptics

REPORT

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• skeptic (n): a person who searches for truth through questioning and reasoning •

Talking to the living loved ones of the dearly departed

by Gary P. Posner

James Van Praagh's *Talking to Heaven*, the *New York Times* #1 nonfiction best seller, may just be the most clearly written, entertaining, comprehensive and persuasive book yet published on any paranormal theme. Wouldn't know. Haven't read it. Doubt it, though.

Having seen this "spirit medium" work several audiences, I am persuaded of this much: Packaging the essence of James Van Praagh's "gift" into book form must necessarily cause lots to be lost in the translation. No, there is only one medium that does justice to this medium's conversations with the dead: the boob tube.

A well-done spirit-medium performance is rare — especially in the opinion of conjurers (and others) well versed in the sleight-of-mind branch of magic known as "mentalism." In talking to the deceased and relaying their messages back to their appreciative loved ones, as Van Praagh has ostensibly been doing for the past 14 years, his primary technique seems indistinguishable from that of a magician/mentalists or, for that matter, the typical "psychic." In fact, he peppers his clients with such a non-stop barrage of questions that enough feedback is obtained to satiate an Ethiopian family of fourteen. His physical features and mannerisms remind me of comedian Rip Taylor who, during my formative years, would instantly win over his audiences by showering them not with questions, but with confetti and a grab bag of gag items.

In any event, one might have hoped that the November 20, 1997, edition of CBS-TV's *48 Hours*, whose skeptical profile of Van Praagh featured James Randi, would have resulted in a cooling down of the "talking to the dead" craze. Not on your life. Despite Randi's instructive commentary as to the easily spotted "mentalism" techniques, *Talking to Heaven* would spiral on to far greater heights.

As Van Praagh explains, when we die, we merely transfer into another energy form inhabiting a "different dimension." Our "thoughts" continue uninterrupted, though they are now communicated on a "higher frequency" or "vibration" than before. Fortunately for Van Praagh, his physiology allows him to pick up these "higher frequency" thought (not sound) waves. Van Praagh then requests that the departed spirit "lower" its thought-wave

frequency back down to our normal level, enabling him to carry on a brisk conversation with the spirit. Even at the "normal/lower" frequency, his mediumship is still required because he hears "pure thoughts," not sounds.

My cathode-ray-tube research of Van Praagh might never have commenced had I not been asked by *Tampa Tribune* religion reporter Michelle Bearden to review a tape of the December 10, 1997, *Larry King Live* show (CNN) and to then provide her with a synopsis of my impressions for use in her March 15 article. Here is what I sent to her:

Van Praagh's methods are similar to those of the other superstars in the field such as Rosemary Altea (author of books like *Proud Spirit*) and George Anderson (*We Don't Die*).

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Hypnosis Featured at TBS Meeting

by Valerie Grey

Family legend has it that long before I was born, in the dead of pre-air-conditioned summer, my father hypnotized a woman at a Miami party into thinking that she was cold, and that she went around the rest of the evening wearing a heavy coat. I can't ask him about it because he's now dead, but I remember that, even as a small child, while he still talked enthusiastically about hypnosis, he refused to demonstrate it for us children. "It's not a game!" he would say. Apparently this party incident had given him a very serious respect for the potential for harming people through hypnosis.

With all the media reports about repressed memories being allegedly recovered through hypnosis — and lawsuits about the alleged recovery of repressed memories — I thought it would be very interesting to have a professional psychologist and trained hypnotherapist come to speak at a TBS meeting, to help us try to separate hypnosis fact from fiction.

TBS Vice Chairman Miles Hardy arranged for a former student of his, P. Rhonne Sanderson, Ph.D., who practices hypnotherapy in Tampa, to speak at our March meeting. Dr. Sanderson gave a very interesting lecture on the colorful history of hypnosis. Of particular interest to

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS Statement of Purpose and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc., is a nonprofit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims. TBS does not reject claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and with other local groups like TBS throughout the United States and the world, though TBS is an autonomous group not formally affiliated with CSICOP or with any other organization.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

Tampa Bay Skeptics Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), and solicit opposing views. Please submit on 3 1/2" discs (in Mac or MS-DOS-ASCII format) or by modem or e-mail, if possible.

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author(s), and not necessarily those of Tampa Bay Skeptics.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS REPORT

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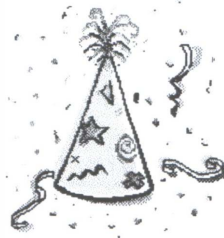
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Chairman's Corner



Happy Birthday TBS!



Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc., has just turned ten years old. Back when it started in 1988 with great fanfare and two well-attended meetings (the first at the main Tampa Public Library, the next at the St. Petersburg campus of USF), I was excited but — well, skeptical. I saw a lot of energy in the room as members of the audience questioned Janet Sciales about astrology at the second meeting. I was impressed with the audio-visual preparations made by Gary Posner, a man clearly on a "mission from God" (or perhaps from his personal deity, "Zontar"). There was no question in my mind that the time was ripe for an organization to combat the rampant silliness of the local media regarding claims of the paranormal.

But over the years I had seen too many good ideas die on the vine. It's relatively easy to trump up interest in a new organization and get the curious to come out and see the show (Ch. 8 News even covered our inaugural meeting). Everyone has great ideas about what the organization can and should be doing, and everyone is convinced that the new organization will be a mover and shaker. After a few meetings, however, with a predictably dwindling following, such organizations almost always fall apart when the time comes for someone to actually do something to keep things going. We are all very busy with our lives and families, and yes it could be a lot of fun, but ABM (Anybody But Me) will have to keep the ball rolling. At that point, the organization withers away until two people are left. They close up the accounts and no more is heard.

What was going to be different about the Tampa Bay Skeptics, I wondered? I certainly counted myself as one who liked a good idea but couldn't see devoting large amounts of time to it. I knew of Gary Posner, because our letters to the editor of the *St. Petersburg Times* about creation-ism had crossed in the newspapers. What I did not know, however, was that Gary had an unbounded enthusiasm and willingness to do the work necessary to not only get things off the ground but keep it going.

Others have played a significant role over the past ten years in the life of TBS. Miles Hardy, our first and only vice chairman (I became our second chairman in 1989), has continued to devote time and interest in TBS. Our quarterly meetings bring out a few familiar faces each time, people who see TBS as more than just a quarterly newsletter. Whenever the local press needs a few skeptical faces in the crowd, or Gary needs some help on an investigation, someone is usually (but not always) available. A new membership officer (Valerie Grey) and a few new faces at TBS meetings have injected some additional energy and renewed confidence in our potential. We also continue to pay our bills on time!

Ultimately, however, the reason we are still going after ten years is the same reason we got started — Gary Posner's dedication to the cause of skepticism. Our newsletter holds us together, and it is primarily the product of Gary's work. Our quarterly meetings are generally organized by Gary. This is not all by choice. Gary would love some more volunteer involvement in putting the newsletter out and organizing meetings.

In the season-ending episode of *The X-Files*, all of Agent Mulder's files are destroyed by the Consortium (well, all but one). We are left with an image of Mulder and Scully holding onto each other, wondering whether all their work has been for naught. Luckily, the opposition to the Tampa Bay Skeptics is not as well organized, and our work can continue. Let's see if we can make twenty years!

Magnetic Power, or Illusion?

by Valerie Grey

I was recently invited to the Venice Yacht Club for a ladies' luncheon and fashion show. The store had a display/sale table with lots of jewelry, some "health" items and books like *The Arthritis Cure*, and some bumpy things that I at first thought were exotic refrigerator magnets.

"Oh, no!" the store owner exclaimed. "These are inserts for your shoes. The bumps correspond *precisely* to sensitive pressure points that connect to all parts of your body" (or something like that). "They will increase your strength and energy!" All for only \$16.95! Later it dawned on me: One size fits all — yet the bumps correspond *precisely* to these alleged pressure points?

The store owner gave us a demonstration. She asked an elderly woman to raise her arms and try to resist the downward pressure the owner exerted on them. The lady's arms went down fairly easily. Then the owner had her stand on the magnetic soles and try again. This time the elderly lady was able to resist the downward pressure.

I tried it, with the same result. But was she pushing as hard the second time? I asked her point blank. ("Of course.") I give her credit for being a good sport and then letting *me* try it with *her* standing on the magnetic soles.

Predictably, the results were not nearly so "impressive" this time, although she did better on the magnetic soles. I forbore to ask if she had been resisting as strongly the initial time.

Had tests with measured amounts of pressure in a physics laboratory been made? I asked. She didn't know, but, of course, she thought we should be convinced by this highly subjective demonstration. Well, at least the elderly woman didn't buy them.

A final interesting observation. In a way, this store owner was in the business of "illusion," as the fashion show made it apparent that the store specialized in inexpensive imitations of name-designer fashions and costume jewelry that was supposed to look like the real thing — for people who would like to be wearing a four-carat diamond but can't afford it. (Wrong crowd, I thought. Ninety-nine percent of the jewels these ladies are wearing are real — even if they are four carats.)

The store owner made a final pitch for her "health magnets" at the conclusion of the fashion show: she had some you could wear on your back for back pain — which "everyone who used them swore by"; she had cured herself of headaches by holding their small magnets up to her head; and, of course, you could stand on the magnetic soles for extra "strength and energy." The Japanese company that manufactured them had been in business for 20 years and the magnets' efficacy was "well proven."

Oh, sure. About the only thing she didn't try to tell us was that they were good for was losing weight. But then, that would have been a neat trick considering she was at least 100 pounds overweight.

So my question is: Did she really believe in "magnet power," or was this just one more "imitation" or "illusion" — like the rings on her own fingers, which she had proudly boasted to us were fakes?

"Hypnosis" (from page 1)

me was his definition of hypnosis: a state of controlled day-dreaming, an altered state of consciousness (not *unconsciousness*), a heightened state of awareness where acceptable suggestions become more acceptable.

Dr. Sanderson stressed that hypnosis is not "mind control" and that you can break out of the hypnotic state or talk or move your muscles at any time. While he said that we all experience hypnotic-like states frequently (e.g., when thoroughly absorbed in a book or movie; or when driving down a long, boring section of road and your mind wanders off — and suddenly you "come to" with no memory whatsoever of having driven for the past 20 minutes), he said that you can't be formally hypnotized if you don't want to be, or be made to do things that go against your basic values.

I volunteered to be the subject for the hypnosis demonstration at the end of the lecture. I have to say at the outset that it wasn't exactly a fair trial of hypnosis, as I get stage fright under the best of circumstances. Although I had my eyes closed and everyone was very quiet, I was constantly aware of the existence of the audience, and it was difficult for me to relax completely and even, at times, to focus on what Dr. Sanderson was saying.

At lunch at the Village Inn afterward, several people asked me about my reactions and experiences during the demonstration. At no point did I feel any loss of personal volitional control, and I can't say that I really *felt* "hypnotized" (but then — how is that *supposed* to feel?). Certainly there was a desire on my part to cooperate with the hypnotist. But I also felt a sense of trust — going hand in hand with Dr. Sanderson's definition of the "acceptable becoming more acceptable." I can see that someone going to a hypnotherapist to stop smoking or drinking, or for weight control, would certainly have that same sense of trust and desire to be fully cooperative.

During his lecture, Dr. Sanderson mentioned that hypnosis has been used successfully in place of standard anesthesia for surgical procedures. TBS Executive Director Gary Posner, a physician, expressed his skepticism of this claim, pointing out that one of the most famous of such anecdotes, concerning the late *New York Times* reporter James Reston's emergency appendectomy in China, turned out to have been highly exaggerated. Dr. Sanderson agreed to provide us with documentary evidence to support his assertion, but as we go to press nearly three months later, the evidence has yet to arrive.

Nevertheless, undergoing hypnosis was definitely a very interesting experience that I would like to try again someday, and I hope that our members and guests also found both the lecture and demonstration worthwhile.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN: Terry A. Smiljanich, J.D., St. Petersburg (James, Hoyer, Newcomer, Forizs & Smiljanich, P.A.)
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 BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Gary P. Posner, Terry A. Smiljanich, Miles W. Hardy

Snippets

The “Amazing” Kreskin (not to be confused with James “The Amazing” Randi) has apparently offered his services gratis to Attorney General Janet Reno, to help ascertain who is telling the truth and who is not with regard to the Clinton White House scandals. A magician specializing in “mentalism,” Kreskin, referred to in the article as a “seer and psychic,” purportedly claimed in his letter to Reno that he has the ability to “determine [the] actual thoughts” of the principals. The Justice Department was so impressed with Kreskin’s claim that it felt no need to reply to his letter. Said spokesman Bert Brandenburg, “He knows our response.”

(*San Francisco Chronicle via Tampa Tribune, Mar. 21*)



“Therapeutic Touch” (TT), the new-age “healing” technique sweeping the nursing profession in North America, seems so transparently ridiculous that even a child ought to be able to see right through it. Well, that’s exactly what happened — sort of — when Emily Rosa’s fourth-grade science-fair project demonstrated that none of the 21 TT practitioners she tested was able to feel the “human energy field” with their hands, as they claim to be able to do. The study ultimately made its way to publication in the April 1 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. It turns out that Emily’s mother Linda, the article’s principal author, was the driving force behind Emily’s selection of TT as a topic for study. Initially as a member of the Rocky Mountain Skeptics, and later as a leader of a breakaway skeptics group, Linda Rosa, a registered nurse, has been a vocal critic of TT for years. But had it not been for the participation of a child, such a study would most likely never have been accomplished. James Randi (and others) have been offering more than \$1-million for the first successful demonstration of TT, and still there have been only a couple of aspirants — all unsuccessful, of course.

(*Scripps Howard News via St. Pete. Times, JAMA, AP via the internet, L.A. Times, Apr. 1; Time, Apr. 13*)

A few days after publication of the *JAMA* article on Therapeutic Touch, *Tampa Tribune* television critic Walt Belcher commented on a test of TT practitioner Dean Kraft to be aired that night on CBS-TV’s *Public Eye with Bryant Gumbel*. Said Belcher, “[The] effort to test Kraft

... [who] says he has been able to heal ... incurable diseases ... [including] cancer ... is weak and unsatisfactory. CBS should have turned this one over to James Randi. ...

(*Tampa Tribune, Apr. 7*)

Richard Hoagland, author of *The Monuments of Mars*, has made a career of promoting the claim of alien-manufactured structures on the surface of that planet (and, more recently, on our own moon). Five years ago, when NASA lost contact with the Mars Observer spacecraft as it was about to maneuver into orbit around the red planet, Hoagland alleged that a “rogue group” within NASA may have intentionally turned off the craft to prevent it from obtaining detailed photographs of the so-called “face” that was seen by the Viking I craft in 1976. Well, the Mars Global Surveyor has now photographed the “face” with more than 10-times-better resolution than Viking and — surprise — there is no face. Hoagland’s explanation: More NASA trickery and coverup.

(*Washington Post via St. Pete. Times, Apr. 7; Hoagland’s website [www.enterprisemission.com]*)

According to a study published in the April issue of the journal *Pediatrics*, 81% of children who die as a result of faith healing would almost certainly survive were they to instead receive conventional medical care. The study examined the circumstances surrounding the deaths, between 1975 and 1995, of 172 children whose parents had opted for miracles over proven remedies. An additional 10% of the dead children would have had a greater than 50% chance of survival had they been allowed to receive medical treatment.

(*St. Pete. Times, Apr. 7*)

Clearwater City Attorney Pam Akin has recommended to the City Commission that fortune tellers once again be permitted to operate legally within the city limits. Banned since 1971 (along with ice cream trucks until last year), some commissioners still want to keep out these “psychics,” or at least limit where they can open shop. Commissioner J.B. Johnson considers them to be “undesirables” who dupe their customers. Says Commissioner Ed Hooper, “I don’t think this is part of the redevelopment we want to encourage.”

(*St. Pete. Times, May 5*)

Louis George, a 61-year-old Key West “psychic,” along with his fugitive daughter-in-law, has been charged with relieving Yvonne Cavin of \$160,000 in a scheme supposedly designed to rid her of “bad spirits.” On the brighter side, at least it did rid Cavin of her belief in psychics — when, three days after the “cleansing ceremony,” she saw George, who preached that money is the root of all evil, driving around town in a new Mercedes.

(*Miami Herald [Keys edition], Mar. 6*)

[“Snippets” are derived from the referenced sources and rewritten by TBS’s editor. Please send your clippings to TBS.]

"Talking to Heaven?" (from page 1)

His technique of obtaining information from the client, and then claiming to have received it from the "departed," was apparent. In one of many examples, he asked King if his deceased father had been a smoker. *After* King said yes, only *then* did Van Praagh claim to vividly see the father puffing away on a cigarette. In another, a caller volunteered that her sister had been murdered. Van Praagh only *then* said that, yes, he could see that the death was very violent.

His other primary technique is to offer facts supposedly obtained from the "departed" and then ask the client, "Does that make sense to you?" If the client is able to make some sense of the reading, it is considered a "success." If not, it may *still* be a "success" — perhaps the client needs to consult with family or friends to figure out what the "departed" meant.

A "departed" mother told Van Praagh that someone in the caller/daughter's family had breast cancer and needed to see a doctor. The daughter said she didn't know who this could be. Rather than taking a few seconds to get that potentially life-saving information from the "departed," Van Praagh simply moved on. That spoke volumes to me about whether his act is genuine, or just a game.

I was initially impressed with one eerie "hit" during the show, until I replayed the segment and realized how Van Praagh did it. A woman called about her baby daughter's grandmother who had died. Larry King interrupted to ask the caller whether the deceased was the *caller's* mother or the *father's* mother. Before the caller could even answer, Van Praagh forcefully announced that, no, it was not the caller's mother, but the paternal grandmother — and he was right! How did he do it? Had it been the *caller's* mother, the caller would likely have inquired about *her mother* rather than *her daughter's grandmother*!

Van Praagh could convince me of his genuineness within 5 minutes, or I could expose him just as quickly, with the simplest test imaginable. Have a series of strangers ask him to communicate with a departed relative, such as a father, and simply ask him to come up with the relatives' names. If he can hear the spirits speaking about all sorts of other matters, he certainly ought to be able to hear their names clearly enough. Only a *genuine* "medium" could correctly get the names without client feedback or doing prior research.

My next viewing of Van Praagh was on the February 23, 1998, edition of *Oprah*, during which she tactfully expressed her own skepticism and also played a few pre-recorded observations by Michael Shermer, founder of the Skeptics Society (see page 6 box). More recently, Shermer was impeccable on the April 3 edition of ABC-TV's *20/20*. On both shows he pointed out that Van Praagh scores far more misses than hits, but that audiences conveniently remember the hits and forget the misses.

And Van Praagh was the focus of attention on the March 5 installment of *Charles Grodin* (CNBC), whose interview I found to be the most disappointing, by far, of the lot. Before acquiring his talk show, Grodin was a deadpan comedic actor of some renown. He has since distinguished himself as a sharp-minded host who, for instance, proved capable (during the O.J. days) of squaring off with the likes of Alan Dershowitz and landing more than his fair share of left hooks to the kidney.

Grodin took a few calls that night (I wanted to call, but the telephone number was never given!), but much of the

TBS members respond to Don Addis Gift Fund

Most local TBS members received in their last issue a notice of Don Addis' wedding plans. Our readers responded with donations totaling \$162, allowing us to purchase a clock (with inscription) for the newlyweds, as well as a plaque in appreciation for Don's ten years of creative cartooning for *TBS Report*. We thank you all, as does Don (see page 7).

hour was devoted to Van Praagh doing readings for several members of a small studio audience. Sometimes he didn't even need to ask a particular question of a client — the information would be eagerly volunteered. At one point a reading about a deceased daughter moved an unrelated audience member to tears.

Despite the effusive praise heaped upon Van Praagh by the host, Grodin did chime in on a few occasions with pointed questions that appeared intended to test his guest's ability to come up with something *specific* (e.g., a name or career) without relying upon feedback from the client. On each such occasion, Van Praagh either attempted to do so and failed, or simply offered a comment such as, "Sometimes it's hard for them to formulate the thought and send it to me in a correct way." Not until I read the article about Van Praagh in the March 16 issue of *Time* magazine did I learn that one of Grodin's pre-arranged calls was from the son of a fabled actor. From *Time*: "What Grodin knew, but didn't share with his audience, was that if Van Praagh really saw and spoke to the caller's father, he somehow failed to recognize the spirit of... John Wayne." But rather than finally expressing some degree of skepticism, as one audience member had bravely done, Grodin, who had no trouble seeing right through the "Dream Team," remained spellbound throughout.

I guess Grodin, like most adults, believes himself too sophisticated to be fooled by a performance such as was witnessed that evening. Certainly Van Praagh must be doing something more than merely talking to the living loved ones of the dearly departed, pumping them for information, and feeding it back to them (along with a few interspersed educated guesses — and maybe even some information obtained surreptitiously), all the while pretending (or imagining) that he is speaking with the dead. (Indeed, he was caught cheating — inquiring of a client beforehand as to whom she was there to contact — during what he thought was a break in the taping of the *20/20* program.) But how can Grodin, and so many others, in spite of their intense desire to "believe," fail to appreciate the obvious similarities between a Van Praagh peppering session and the party games of "Hot and Cold" and "Twenty Questions"?

On the other hand, who am I to pass judgment? Grodin may have been dead right when he compared Van Praagh's "gift" to that of Jesus Christ and, by so doing, implied that *Talking to Heaven* deserves a revered place on the bookshelf or mantelpiece alongside the *New Testament*. Wouldn't know. Haven't read them. Doubt it, though.

Note: This article also appears as a "Commentary" in the current issue of Skeptic magazine (Vol. 6 No. 1).

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"UFO Roundup"

Excerpted from
www.ParaScope.com

On Mar. 21, Jeff Ritzmann, a Maryland man vacationing in Florida, spotted a UFO while standing outside the Best Western Hotel near Gulf Breeze.

According to Carole Baker of the *Pensacola Beach Islander*, Ritzmann grabbed his camcorder and "shot an approximate 13-second video of a UFO flying from west to east between Pensacola Beach and Gulf Breeze. . . . The video shows a bright white/silver object traveling quite fast across the sky. Toward the end of the video, the object seems to tilt, or turn, showing a bright flash as it catches the sun's rays. After that, it appears to fade [and] pursues an erratic course until it is out of sight. This object does not appear to be an airplane approaching Pensacola airport, since its speed and altitude are too high and fast" for a conventional craft.

On March 23, Florida authorities closed Highway 192 in Holipaw, Florida, about five miles north of Narcoossee, the site of a March 17 flyover of a V-shaped UFO. The highway was closed following a head-on collision between a pickup truck and a semi-tractor trailer hauling a load of chemicals. It was supposed to remain closed "for a day." However, on March 25, authorities said the road would remain closed "until sometime tomorrow."

UFOlogist Daniel Cox pointed out that Holipaw is in a "rural, wooded and swampy" area, adding, "Closing of Highway 192 in this vicinity, near the intersection of Highways 192 and 441, effectively eliminates all civilian traffic in the region, at least as far as primary roads are concerned." This has led some UFO buffs to wonder if a saucer landed early last week in Holipaw.

On Wednesday evening, Mar. 25, a newspaper reporter from Sebring spotted mysterious lights in the sky over Highway 60 as he was driving to Lake Wales.

Each night from Mar. 23-27, "a crew of five to ten people harvesting palms have been seeing lights in the sky" an estimated 20-30 miles north of Lake Okeechobee, according to Jean Brown of Tampa Bay MUFON.

On March 27, the operations manager at the U.S. Air Force's Avon Park Bombing Range informed Ms. Brown that "for the past two weeks, the Air Force has been dropping flares attached to parachutes, two at a time, for A-10s at high altitude testing night vision goggles." He said testing was supposed to end on March 26, and that they have received many calls as these flares have been seen from Lake Wales south.

TBS in the Media

Terry Smiljanich appeared on the Ch. 8 11:00 News on Friday the 13th (of March) to offer a skeptical view on — guess what.

Miles Hardy's input was featured on Ch. 13's 10:00 News on April 24, during a report on the alleged "healing" powers of dolphins (also see *TBS Report*, Fall 1997).

Gary Posner was quoted in Michelle Bearden's March 15 *Tampa Tribune* article on James Van Praagh (see our lead article). Posner was also quoted in a March 23 *Asheville* (NC) *Citizen-Times* story about Dr. Larry Dossey (author of *Healing Words*) called "The Power of Prayer." The writer, John Boyle, was referred to Posner by Dossey himself, who considers Posner one of his leading critics. Posner's review of *Healing Words*, published in the Summer 1994 issues of *TBS Report* and *Skeptical Inquirer*, can be found on his website. And he was interviewed for Jeanne Malmgren's April 14 *St. Pete. Times* article on James Randi: http://www.sptimes.com/Floridian/41498/The__quack__hunter.html (two underscore characters both before and after "quack").

Letters • Readers' Forum

Editor: During our luncheon following the March TBS meeting, you learned of our repressed-memory nightmare and requested an account of our experience. Here it is. [We plan to publish the essay in the next issue of TBS Report. —G.P.]

It has now been 6 1/2 years since that ill-fated day in September and we still have not had any contact with our daughter or her family. For us, however, this tragedy has produced a bright side. It has brought the rest of our family closer together.

Although the American Medical Association and the British Psychiatric Society have criticized the repressed-memory foolishness, the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association have tiptoed cautiously around the issue, pretending that a theory based on junk science has relevance. Little wonder that the shrink profession ranks with the astrologers and psychics.

We are sorry that we will be missing the June TBS meeting, but we will be off in the wilds of Michigan and Indiana at that time. We'll see you all again in September. Keep up the good work.

Bob and Janet McKelvey
Hudson
rmckelv@innet.com

Editor: I recently gave another lecture (similar to the one I wrote about in the Winter issue) at St. Petersburg Junior College, this time for the honors science program, and it was even more successful than the first lecture last year for the psychology club. I'll be presenting these lectures on a regular basis now. I feel great being able to promote the rational/skeptical view in this capacity. The students certainly need and appreciate it.

I'm sending in my dues for the coming year. As a

proud member of TBS, I'd like to thank you for your fine stewardship.

William W. Hall
Clearwater
billhall@sprynet.com

Editor: I enjoyed your presentation on TBS that you gave at the St. Pete. Bayfront Hilton last November during Paul Kurtz's visit.

The reason I am writing, though, is because I'm especially impressed by the *Tampa Bay Skeptics Report*, not only for its content (which is certainly praiseworthy in itself), but also for the excellent printing quality. Moreover, your newsletter's emphasis on inquiry combined with critical thinking makes it a perfect resource for a new children's enrichment program that I am coordinating.

I hope to see you again at an upcoming TBS meeting. For the time being, please accept my enclosed check for membership.

Robert Curry
St. Petersburg
curry@gte.net

Thanks, Gary -
To you and all concerned
for the splendid wedding
gifts. We'll cherish my
plaque, although my
contribution is wee
compared to yours - and
now Valerie's. The clock
is elegant. Lydia loves it.
What a kind and thoughtful
bunch you are.
"B" Don

Editor: On March 10, *Good Morning America* featured Dale Graff, author of *Tracks in a Psychic Wilderness*.

Graff said he was with the government's ESP program, and that the program had produced numerous proofs of ESP. How about that malarkey?

Please keep up the good work. It looks like the mystics are gaining on us.

Jerry Hobbs
Lutz

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Announcing...

Press and
Public
Welcome

Tampa Bay Skeptics Quarterly Meetings

3rd Saturday of every March, June, September,
and December (barring unforeseen conflicts)

Our next meeting will be:

SATURDAY, JUNE 20 --- 10:30 A.M. - 1:30 P.M.

AUDITORIUM (1st FLOOR)

PUBLIC LIBRARY, 900 N. ASHLEY DRIVE, TAMPA

Scheduled: TBS 10-Year Birthday Celebration

Also: Open Forum, video of media coverage
of the paranormal, and other good stuff

Followed by optional lunch and "spirited" conversation
at the Village Inn on N. Dale Mabry near Kennedy Blvd.

Note: Parking is available in adjacent garage with 2nd floor
covered walkway to library. If attendant attempts to charge
an "Event" price, explain that you are going to the library.

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Renier Chapter Now On Web

Gary Posner's chapter on Noreen Renier from the
book *Psychic Sleuths* (Prometheus Books, 1994) is now
available, in its entirety, on the web. The link can be
accessed from Posner's home page, which in turn is
accessible from the TBS website.

No winners in TBS Sweepstakes

So many were so close! But (unfortunately) no one
returned the winning number in the TBS Sweepstakes
(see last issue). Thus (fortunately) our \$1,000 jackpot
remains available for the first person who is able to
demonstrate genuine "psychic" power to TBS.

== Visit TBS Online ==

<http://members.aol.com/tbayskept/tbs.html>

If for no other reasons, check out the web versions of
our *TBS Report* articles for their related **links** and for the
occasional **graphics** not present in our printed newsletters
due to space constraints. To find out at a glance about any
significant additions/changes since your last visit, click on
"**What's New on the Site**" at the top of the Home Page.

And, if you haven't already done so, be sure to send us
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may add you to our electronic **TBS Update Service**.

TBS and James Randi "Psychic" Challenges

Tampa Bay Skeptics has a standing **\$1,000** offer for
verifiable scientific proof of any paranormal phenomenon.

James "The Amazing" Randi has secured pledges
totaling more than **\$1,000,000** for the first person able to
successfully demonstrate paranormal power for him.

These monetary rewards, and a place in history, await
the first successful candidates. All UFOlogists, psychics,
astrologers, dowsers, and the like are encouraged to come
forward and offer your proof (see the "\$\$\$ Challenges"
page on the TBS website, or contact us for more details).

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